

D.C.  
9/28United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

**1. Name of Property**historic name Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Building

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**street & number 900 South Wabash Avenue  not for publicationcity, town Chicago  vicinitystate Illinois code IL county Cook code 031 zip code 60605**3. Classification**

## Ownership of Property

- private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

## Category of Property

- building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

## Number of Resources within Property

| Contributing  | Noncontributing          |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| <u>1</u>      | <u>      </u> buildings  |
| <u>      </u> | <u>      </u> sites      |
| <u>      </u> | <u>      </u> structures |
| <u>      </u> | <u>      </u> objects    |
| <u>1</u>      | <u>0</u> Total           |

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously

listed in the National Register 0**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Commerce/Trade--BusinessCurrent Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Domestic--Multiple Dwelling**7. Description**Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Commercial Style/ LATE 19TH AND EARLY  
20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTSfoundation Concrete  
walls Brick, Cast Ironroof Asphalt  
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Building, 900 South Wabash, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, is located on the southwest corner of Ninth Street and South Wabash Avenue. Set in a clearly commercial area of approximately one-to ten-story brick buildings, 900 is adjacent to a one-story brick store-front structure on the south. To the west is the elevated train, with an alley underneath it. The Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Building is a seven-story flat-roofed rectangular structure, measuring approximately 42' on Wabash, the street it faces, and 165' on Ninth Street. It is a low-rise commercial structure designed in 1907 to house the national headquarters of Fairbanks, Morse & Co., which it did for thirty years. The structure is timber framed, sheathed in a warm red face brick on the north and east primary facades. Common brick sheaths the south and west secondary facades. Ornamental cast iron trim delineates the showroom and second-floor office area. Molded cornices of limestone top the second, sixth and seventh floors. Sills on the primary facades are also of limestone. Currently undergoing a certified rehabilitation, the integrity of the structure, in terms of design, materials and craftsmanship, is excellent. Over the years there have been no changes on the primary facades to the exterior. The one-and-a-half-story showroom space and the hallway to upstairs offices is unchanged. Warehouse loft space at the rear of the building will serve as a restaurant. Upstairs loft spaces are being converted into apartments. The timber framing system remains exposed. Overall, the entire building is in excellent condition.

The east facade, with its front entrances opening onto South Wabash Avenue, is two bays wide. Each bay, between floors three and seven, is separated by shallow brick pilasters. There are two double-hung 4/1 windows in each bay. Bands of limestone top the pilasters and separate, by the creation of a shallow cornice, the sixth and seventh floors. A narrow double band of limestone projects just above the seventh floor windows. Topping the building is the third molded limestone cornice.

Floors one and two of the Wabash Avenue facade have a different ornamental treatment. Set into the brick corner piers, just beneath the stone cornice topping the second story, is a limestone band with raised stone letters proclaiming the name of the business, "Fairbanks, Morse & Co.". Surrounding floors one and two is a one foot wide ornamental band of cast iron that has

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a pattern of circles containing a symmetrical abstracted four-petal floral motif alternating with a less stylized symmetrical foliate pattern. Separating two wide bays is a single cast iron polygonal column with vertical bands of similar ornament. Circles containing a second abstracted four-petal floral motif alternate with a less stylized four part foliate motif. Leaf patterns, set in a deeper relief, form the column's capital. The first floor, one-and-a-half stories high, contained a showroom that displayed company products. Each of two tall display windows lighting the showroom is divided and topped by a divided glass transom. The corner doorway to the showroom, topped by two rectangular glass transoms, is recessed behind the wall plane. The second entrance, to the upstairs offices and the rear warehouse facilities, is also set behind the building's wall plane. The inset walls are paneled and the door is banded by a fluted frame with corner bullet moldings. Above the door, flush with the plane of the wall, is a rectangular glass transom. Between the first and second story is a wide metal band and a narrow brick band. Set just above this are two wide Chicago windows, one filling each bay. The side windows are 3/1 operable sash. The center fixed sash is made up of two panes, one wide and one narrow.

The north facade is ten bays wide. Nine bays above the second story contain two 3/1 double-hung windows. One bay, located at the western end of the facade, contains one 4/1 double-hung window. Each bay is separated by a shallow pilaster topped by a molded stone and brick capital. Three cornices, above the second, sixth and top floors, extend from the eastern front of the building around the north facade. The four eastern bays of the first and second floors contain one-and-a-half story storefront windows on the first floor and Chicago windows on the second. Like the front facade they are banded by ornamental ironwork and separated by polygonal columns supporting rich foliated capitals. The rear six bays contain double-hung 3/1 windows in pairs with no pilasters between them. The west bay contains one 4/1 double-hung window. There is a door set in the seventh bay. Because of the window configurations on the primary facades of the building, as evident in an early drawing, it is known that the showroom occupied the ground floor of the east facade and the first four bays of the north facade. It is likely that the executive offices occupied the area above the storefront containing Chicago windows. Upstairs this section of the building could have either served as office space or warehoused merchandise. The rear of the first floor of the building clearly was a warehouse.

The west rear facade is of common brick punctuated by two bays of pairs of 3/3 double-hung windows. On the ground floor are four window openings. There is a rear doorway on the south side of this facade. The south facade is also of common brick with some 3/1 double-hung windows

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topped by segmental arches. The few windows located in the east half of the brick facade have been bricked in, suggested that there once was an adjacent party wall building.

Inside, the building's design reflects its original mixed use. Although existing records have turned up no interior photos taken before November, 1987, enough remains of the building's interior to indicate its original function as company headquarters, containing showroom, office and warehousing space.

The first floor, on the east side of the building, housed the company showroom. It has its own entrance on the north side of the Wabash front. A small drawing of 900 S. Wabash in Bulletin 3040 (ca. 1920) of the Fairbanks Morse Name Plate shows merchandise in the large display windows that extend across Wabash and four bays on 9th Street. The first floor interior ceiling height is 1-1/2 stories. Cylindrical columns, with molded bands at the top each have a broad square capital supporting double floor beams connected by metal flanges. This support system extends all the way to the back of the first floor. The rear of the first floor, which is lit by 1/1 double-hung windows and accessed by a door on 9th Street, likely served as warehousing space. The flooring is of concrete. There is a large freight elevator at the back of the first floor and wide open berth shipping dock opening onto the back alley. The freight elevator, along with a rear stairway with plastered walls, extends up through the building enabling storage on all floors. Walls on the first floor are sheathed in plaster.

The upper floors are accessed from a second front entrance on the south side of the Wabash Avenue facade. It opens into a hall, separated by a curved firewall from the showroom. The floor is tiled, surrounded by moldings. The staircase has an iron balustrade. Walls are painted brick between the basement and the first floor and sheathed in plaster to the top of the building.

Upstairs loft spaces have been divided into apartments. Except for the second floor, it is impossible to say with certainty exactly which floors contained offices and which were used for warehousing. Because the front of the second floor has large Chicago windows flooding the interior with light and air, it is highly likely that this was the area where Company president Charles Hosmer Morse and other top executives managed the sales and distribution of Fairbanks, Morse & Company products.

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On each floor, dry walled hallways lead to the apartment units. Within each unit, outside walls are of brick. The second-floor Chicago windows are surrounded by wood moldings. Other windows have either wood or brick sills. Interior apartment walls generally do not extend to the ceiling, and the structural system is exposed. Square wood columns have metal caps supporting heavy wood beams. The building's timber-frame warehouse construction system is evident despite the building's change in use.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Agriculture

1907-1937

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Eckstorm, Christian

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Building meets criterion A for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The structure has national significance historically because it housed the national headquarters of a large and growing company which developed, produced and distributed a number of products that primarily had a substantial impact on U.S. agriculture. The business was administered from 900 South Wabash, Chicago, between 1907, when the structure was built, and 1937, when Fairbanks, Morse & Co. moved to larger quarters at 606 South Michigan Avenue.

Starting, in 1830, in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, with the invention of a revolutionary highly accurate scale, the company, as it grew and acquired manufacturing plants after the Civil War, pioneered in the development of gasoline and Diesel powered engines for agricultural use, manufactured these engines, plus scales, pumps, railroad equipment and household products in their several plants and distributed them by means of a wide network of sales offices located throughout the United States and Canada. Fairbanks, Morse & Co. was a rapidly expanding company especially during the years it was headquartered at 900. In 1916 Charles Hosmer Morse, who started as an apprentice with the E & T Fairbanks Company in Vermont in 1850 and established Fairbanks, Morse & Co. in Chicago in 1871, bought out the parent company, laying the groundwork for substantial future growth. After Morse died in 1921, his descendants ran the firm. Although bought out by Colt Industries in 1963, the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. name was retained and the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. division of Colt Industries continues to produce engines in its Beloit, Wisconsin plant. The firm is 158 years old, and the only structure reflecting its significance as a manufacturing concern headquartered in Chicago is the building located at 900 South Wabash Avenue. Earlier headquarter buildings have either burned or been demolished. The offices at 606 South Michigan Avenue have been extensively remodeled, inside and out, and there is no visible indication that Fairbanks, Morse & Co. ever resided there. Stone letters across the front of 900 South Wabash spell out Fairbanks, Morse & Co., and the building's design

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clearly expresses its use as showroom, office and warehouse space. The building's excellent integrity underscores its significance.

In order to understand the company's subsequent impact on the country's economy it is necessary to track its humble beginnings and its remarkable growth.

Fairbanks, Morse & Co. traces its origin back to 1830, in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, when Thaddeus Fairbanks invented a scale that, according to the book Pioneers of Industry (the company history published in 1945), had a revolutionary effect in speeding up the pace of commercial transactions. Thaddeus, with his brothers Erastus and Joseph, in the 1830's established the firm of E & T Fairbanks & Co. in St. Johnsbury. That early history, and the significance of the scale and its impact on the economy is rightfully associated with structures in St. Johnsbury. The story of expansion and the impact of the several products that have come to be associated with Fairbanks, Morse & Co. begins with the involvement of Charles Hosmer Morse.

Charles Hosmer Morse began with E & T Fairbanks at age seventeen, working for \$50 a year and board. In 1857, having been with the company seven years, he moved to Chicago to work as a salesman for Fairbanks Greenleaf to market E & T Fairbanks scales. Then, in 1865, he moved to Cincinnati, took on other lines besides scales and established the first branch of the business known as Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Five years later he moved back to Chicago to assist Greenleaf who was ailing and to become a partner in Fairbanks Greenleaf & Co. The following year, in 1871, Greenleaf died. When the company reopened after the Chicago fire of October, 1871, it opened as Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Morse stayed in Chicago and made it until 1893 the company's home base. It is logical that Chicago reigned as company headquarters for so many years--primarily because of the city's central position geographically and its importance as a railroad and water transportation locus. Once Morse took over, he continued to market scales but expanded the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. line to include other products such as windmills and pumps manufactured by the Eclipse Wind Engine Co. in Beloit. In 1890, he bought them out. During the late 19th century, the firm represented the Sheffield Car Company which invented and manufactured the velocipede. In 1918, he bought them out.

Morse guided Fairbanks, Morse & Co. into the manufacture and distribution of many products, especially products that related to agriculture. His big move, the one that paved the way for the sweeping growth and expansion of the company was in the development of the internal combustion engine. During the 1880's Morse had an interest in, and Fairbanks, Morse,

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& Co. had been sales agents for, the Williams Engine Works, in Beloit, that manufactured steam engines, gas engines and ball bearing motors. Morse purchased the company in 1893 and decided to foster and develop the gasoline internal combustion engine. The same year he brought John Charter and his son, James, to Beloit to head the engineering department of Fairbanks, Morse & Co. The Charters controlled several gas engine patents during the 1890's and introduced the gasoline or liquid fuel type known as the Charter engine. C. H. Wendell, in his history, American Gasoline Engines Since 1872 points out, that with the Charters' introduction of the gasoline engine, farmers and others who lived miles away from a public gas works were finally able to use internal combustion engines.

Mechanization in farming traces its roots back to the 1830's and continued to accelerate as the century unfolded. The shortage of manpower on farms during the Civil War years greatly stimulated the use of such labor-saving machines on farms as cultivators, mowers and reapers. The more than doubling of the U.S. farmland between 1870 and 1900 served to maintain the strong demand for labor-saving farm machines. Total farm input increased by 135% between 1870 and 1900 because of more farms, more acres in crop production, more workers in agriculture and (importantly) more machines and equipment.<sup>2</sup>

In the late 19th century steam was typically used to power farm machines. But although they had the potential to harvest up to 100 acres a day, steam powered combines of the 1880's and early 1900's were inefficient and hazardous.<sup>3</sup> Horses and mules continued to provide almost all the power used on farms.<sup>4</sup>

A real turning point was the development of the gasoline engine. The first gasoline engine manufactured by Fairbanks, Morse & Co. was shipped out of the Beloit plant in 1893.<sup>5</sup> Pioneers of Industry (1945) notes that the engineering staff of the company has been engaged in the process of simplifying and improving the gasoline engine ever since.<sup>6</sup>

Wendell singles out two companies that led the way in the production of gasoline engines: International Harvester and Fairbanks, Morse & Co. He notes that Fairbanks, Morse & Co. and International Harvester quickly seized the opportunity to enter a new field. Following their lead, thousands of companies entered the business, but they were the leaders. Wendell devotes twenty pages in his book (compared to fourteen to International Harvester) to illustrations and descriptions of Fairbanks, Morse & Co. engines manufactured between 1913 and 1918. Fairbanks, Morse

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& Co. were not the first company to build internal combustion engines, but as Wendell states, "Fairbanks, Morse & Co. swamped their competitors in short order and went on to become one of the world's largest engine builders."<sup>8</sup>

Although gasoline engines had been in production since the 1890's, the company continued to manufacture and substantially improve them in their application to agriculture during the thirty years (1907-1937) Fairbanks, Morse & Co. had its headquarters at 900 South Wabash.

The "Type Z" engine (which operated on gasoline or kerosene) invented by Fairbanks, Morse & Co. is an example of a popular new engine type developed after the 1890's. Wendell comments, "Undoubtedly the most popular of all Fairbanks, Morse & Co. engines was the Type Z series announced in 1915. Of light weight and simple design, the Type Z engine sold like no other--even the venerable International Harvester took notice of it...<sup>9</sup> By 1920, a quarter million "Z" farm engines had been produced. Keeping in mind that the following is from company material, it is none-the-less interesting to quote the March 1920 issue of the company magazine, Name-Plate.

THE FAIRBANKS-MORSE "Z" ENGINE  
DOMINATES THE FARM ENGINE FIELD

You need look no further than the Fairbanks, Morse "Z" Engine for an example of the service this great house has rendered to agricultural development. Here, too, you will find the product always approaching the goal reflected in the Fairbanks-Morse Quality Seal.

For no ordinary engine would meet the farm power requirements of more than a quarter million users. Years of unceasing research--hundreds of thousands of dollars spent in perfecting manufacturing processes--the efforts of thousands of skilled engine builders--all have gone into the "Z" to make it what it is today.

This sturdy engine has helped revolutionize farming methods. It has released countless farm hands for the production work of feeding the world. Its uses are as varied as the applications of power itself. Its dependability is a by-word wherever the "Z" is used.

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The dominant position it holds today in the farm engine field is a reward justly earned. For it, too, must merit the Mark of Quality by which all Fairbanks-Morse products are gauged.<sup>10</sup>

The "Z" engine was manufactured in a small 1½ h.p. size for the churn, separator, washing machine or other light requirements, in a 3 h.p. size for grinding feed, sawing wood and similar work and in a still larger size, up to 20 h.p., for heavier jobs. As illustrated in *Pioneers of Industry*, it was employed for everything from providing electric lighting to shelling corn.<sup>11</sup> The engine is still in use today.

In 1912 Fairbanks, Morse & Co. entered the field of Diesel engines. As the price of gasoline and kerosene went up, it began to be clear that people would demand lower priced fuels. In 1892, in Germany, Rudolf Diesel invented an engine that used low grade cheap fuel. It resembled the gasoline engine in that it operated by the burning and expansion of fuel in a cylinder forcing down a piston which transmits the thrust to a power shaft. Unlike the gasoline engine, however, the Diesel (as it came to be called) needs no carburetor for mixing gas and air and no system for igniting the mixture with a spark. Diesels were introduced into the United States around 1900. An unpublished company history points out that the demand of the American market was for a simpler and more fool-proof engine; even if it should be at the expense of fuel consumption. Fairbanks, Morse & Co., therefore, concentrated on a hot bulb or semi-Diesel engine when they started manufacturing Diesels. They experimented with a heavy duty two-cycle horizontal engine in 10, 15, 20 and 25 h.p. In 1914 they brought out a vertical two-cycle crankcase scavenging stationary engine called the "Y" type, followed by a similar type for marine service called the "C-0" type. "They filled such a need that they practically dominated their respective markets for years."<sup>12</sup>

As time progressed, Fairbanks, Morse & Co. continued to develop more economical large and small engines of the semi-Diesel and full-Diesel type for many uses. So far as it was known in 1936, Fairbanks, Morse & Co. was the only one making piston cooled engines in sizes below 15" in diameter.<sup>13</sup>

The uses of Fairbanks, Morse & Co. engines are enumerated in Bulletin No. 1010 published by the company. In agriculture, they provided low cost power for flour mills, cotton gins and irrigation. One of the world's

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largest irrigation projects, Willacy County Water Control and Improvement District #1 in South Texas, was irrigated by the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Diesel pumping plant. Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Diesel engines were also used in oil fields, public power plants and mining operations.<sup>14</sup> On U.S. waterways, Fairbanks, Morse & Co marine Diesels powered dredges, ferry boats, fishing boats, tankers and tugs--practically all types of vessels.<sup>15</sup>

Pioneers in Industry gives a clear idea of the broad market Fairbanks, Morse & Co. penetrated:

Fairbanks-Morse "Y" engine could be found driving cotton gins and powering cottonseed oil mills; Fairbanks-Morse "CO" engines were providing power for fishing fleets up and down the coasts and for river towboats; Fairbanks-Morse "Z" engines were performing the labor on thousands of farms which previously had been carried on entirely by farm hands; Fairbanks-Morse pumps, driven by "Y" and "Z" engines, were operating irrigation projects in many parts of the country; and other Fairbanks-Morse engines were being used in town lighting plants; railroads, water works, factories, ice and refrigeration plants, for flood control and sewage disposal, and for driving rock crushers and land and floating dredges.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1930's the company even got into the production of household items: air conditioning systems ("Ortho-Clime") refrigerators (the "Conservador") and radios (with the exclusive feature "third dimension tone.")<sup>17</sup>

In the Book of Beloit published in 1936, a reproduced ad from one of their many thick catalogs, for the company's Model 32-E Diesel engine sums up their philosophy: "Since Fairbanks, Morse & Co. first engaged in the business of manufacturing internal combustion engines back in 1893, it has consistently dedicated itself to the ideal of producing engines of simplified design and construction, with greater reliability and longer life, with a consideration of the availability and cost of fuels and always low fuel consumption."<sup>18</sup>

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While new engine types were being developed and manufactured the entire Fairbanks, Morse and Co. manufacturing and sales organization was expanding. Fairbanks, Morse and Co. continued to buy up factories and open sales branches. In 1906, Fairbanks, Morse & Co. acquired the Three Rivers Electric Company in Three Rivers, Michigan to manufacture D.C. motors and generators and acquired the Commercial Electric Company of Indianapolis to develop and manufacture induction motors. A factory was established in Toronto. In the nineteenth century sales branches had been established through the Midwest--in Louisville, St. Paul, the Dakotas, Kansas City--and in Los Angeles. In the twentieth, others were added in the East and South (New York, 1902; Dallas, 1908; Atlanta, Baltimore, 1914; New Orleans, 1916. The May, 1920 Name-Plate lists eight factories in the U.S. and Canada; 28 sales branches in the U.S., 13 in Canada and a sales office in London.<sup>19</sup> Fairbanks, Morse & Co. opened a warehouse in Chicago's Central Manufacturing District in 1920. The headquarters stayed at 900.

The year 1916 was particularly significant in the growth of Fairbanks, Morse & Co., for it was then that Fairbanks, Morse & Co. acquired all the capital stock of E & T Fairbanks & Co. including plants in East Moline, Terre Haute and Sherbrooke, Ontario. This information was published in Moody's Manual of Railroads and Corporation Securities, Vol. 2. Industrial Securities and Public Utilities, 1916. In addition to describing the transaction, they listed the firm's general offices at 900 South Wabash and noted:

Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Inc. in 1901 in Ill. Mfrs. of gasoline and oil engines, steam pumps and windmills, also deals in electrical equipment, railroad equipment and machinery supplies. Has the exclusive selling rights in the Western State of the scale products of E & T Fairbanks & Co. Manufacturing plant known as the Fairbanks, Morse Mfr. Co. located at Beloit, Wis. Sales office in Chicago Ill. and in the principal cities of the west; also at N.Y., Buenos Aires and London, Eng.<sup>20</sup>

The company's assets during this period, according to Moody's Analysis of Investments, Part II, Industrial Investment jumped from \$10,390,852 in 1916 to \$27,727,901 in 1919. In that year Moody's rated Fairbanks, Morse & Co. preferred stock Aa and common stock A,<sup>21</sup> reflecting the company's low debt, high earnings and stability of dividend payments over a period of time.

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The impact Fairbanks, Morse & Co. had nationally through the development, industrial production and commercial distribution of its products has been considerable. This was true during the company's period of expansion, when it occupied 900 South Wabash as well as before and after. In 1925, Fairbanks, Morse & Co. purchased G. W. Price Pump and Engine Company, manufacturers of turbine and propeller pumps, San Francisco; in 1928, the company purchased Stanley White Machine Works, Stuttgart, Arkansas.

The company survived the Depression and played an important role in the Navy effort in World War II. This is discussed by John D. Alden in his book, The Fleet Submarine in the U.S. Navy, A Design and Construction History. In 1934, after several years of research and development, the first successful open piston engines were produced by Fairbanks, Morse & Co. and, in 1935, they were installed in the famous aircraft carriers Yorktown and Enterprise and in the U.S. submarines Pollock and Plunger. The engines were so successful that when World War II broke out, until 1944, the navy pre-empted their entire output of open piston engines thus preventing the engine's use for any further commercial purposes.<sup>22</sup>

A great portion of the success of Fairbanks, Morse & Co. is due to the ingenuity, perseverance and leadership of Charles Hosmer Morse. Up to 1865, when Morse was transferred to Cincinnati, the principal business of the concern had been scales. In Cincinnati he opened a factory to make letter and waybill presses and warehouse trucks. He sold Remington Typewriters and Hancock Inspirators. That was just the beginning. Morse bought plants, increased product lines and, as territories became more populated, opened branch after branch of Fairbanks, Morse & Co.'s selling organization. He had a business acumen that he clearly passed on to his children and grandchildren, who ran the company until 1958 when there was a great proxy battle. The company was bought by Penn Texas which was succeeded by Fairbanks Whitney. Colt Industries which maintains a Fairbanks, Morse Division, took over in 1963. Even though Colt is in the middle of a buy out, there are still Fairbanks, Morse & Co. plants. The name is still revered.

Col. Robert H. Morse (the son of Charles Hosmer Morse) was on the cover of Business Week May, 17, 1947,<sup>23</sup> and the whole proxy battle was covered constantly by Business Week during the 50's. The Morse family and Fairbanks, Morse & Co. were nationally recognized as having a significant impact on the nation's economy.

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The story of Morse parallels the story of Horatio Alger. He started earning \$50 a year as an apprentice in 1850, shepherded the company through its great expansion and died in 1921, an enormously wealthy man. Morse left a will of \$12 million and is said to have given away an equal amount before his death.

Although not a household work, Morse was truly a great industrial pioneer, an entrepreneur comparable to men like Cyrus Hall McCormick, Henry Ford, King Camp Gillette or Frederick L. Maytag. Today companies have image-making or descriptive names (Apple, Snowmobile) but in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century companies took their names from the inventor (Gillette) or merchandiser (Maytag) of the article(s) being produced. Fairbanks, Morse & Co. was typical. But, Fairbanks, Morse & Co. made engines tucked away in farm machines, irrigation plants, railroad cars and submarines, not razors or cars. That made Morse and his company less well known although in no way less important. It is apt that Morse's obituary in Name-Plate describes him as a great manufacturer, a great salesman, and a great financier combined, a man of "unusual vision."<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Morse's name is commemorated most publicly in Winter Park, Florida, where in the later years of his life he had a second home. It was a community he helped found. He built at his own expense the first golf course in Winter Park, financed the first bank and the first movie house, started the first newspaper, built the Seminole Hotel, and contributed to the building of the town hall. He also financed the building of a modern fruit packing plant in Winter Park and was one of the prime movers in the establishment of the Florida Citrus Exchange. When the city purchased a site for a park, it was named the Charles H. Morse Park. As a memorial to her grandfather, Jeanette Genius McKean, in 1942, founded the Morse Gallery of Art and, to fund it, the Charles Hosmer Morse Foundation. The gallery contains over 4000 pieces of Tiffany glass, windows, lamps and furniture including the mosaics, windows and furnishings from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition Chapel and all that remains of the Daffodil Terrace from Laurelton Hall, Tiffany's Long Island estate, which burned in 1957.

In Chicago, Morse's significance is acknowledged in Clark J. Herringshaw's City Blue Book of American Biography, 1913<sup>25</sup> and the Book of Chicagoans, 1911.<sup>26</sup> But it is most visible in the large stone letters reading Fairbanks, Morse & Co. over the second-floor offices at 900 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago.

The architecture of 900 South Wabash, although not singularly noteworthy, reflects the structure's use, and the building has considerable architectural interest.

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As noted, its use as showroom, offices and warehouse space by Fairbanks, Morse & Co. is reflected in the building's design. On the ground floor the one-and-a-half-story space is lit by huge glass windows totally opening up for public view the Wabash front and first four bays on Ninth Street (in 1907, named Eldredge Place). A sketch in Name-Plate shows Fairbanks, Morse & Co. products displayed in the building.<sup>27</sup> Directly above the ground floor are large Chicago windows. The second floor space, because of its interior light and views undoubtedly was prime space and housed offices of the top executives. The upstairs floors could have served as offices or as storage space. Cross beams are made up of double timbers to support heavier loads so the storage or the display of engines would have been possible. First floor one-and-a-half-story loft space, lit by large double-hung windows in the west six bays of Ninth Street undoubtedly was used for warehousing merchandise.

The building at 900 South Wabash has architectural distinction. It is typical of the second wave Chicago School mid-rise office building popular between 1900-1910. Hundreds were designed by Holabird and Roche and several lesser-known architects. They often served as showroom-executive office-warehouse facilities. A slightly earlier example would be the Gage Bros. Building, 1899, Holabird & Roche, Louis Sullivan, 18 S. Michigan, and a later one, the Oliver Typewriter Building, 1908, Holabird & Roche, 159-67 South Dearborn, Chicago. Like them, the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Building is clearly a business building, ornamented only to the extent that it expresses the building's function and structure. Its showrooms are framed in simple understated ornament. The design of the upstairs floors reflects the building's underlying (wood) skeletal structure. 900 is a better example than many which are similar because of its handsome design and excellent integrity.

The building was designed by Christian Eckstorm (sometimes misspelled Eckstrom). Although not very well known, his credentials are good. He was, before going into practice on his own, head of Henry Ives Cobb's office and served as superintendent on the Federal Building (dem.) and on the Newberry Library. Like Holabird & Roche, whose repertoire extended from the Chicago School to the Baroque depending on client needs and wishes, Eckstorm could turn out an excellent Chicago School structure like the Hunter Building, S.E. corner of Madison Street and Wacker Drive, (dem.) 1908. Or he could design an elegant Beaux Arts building like the Musical College, 624-30 South Michigan, 1908. But his forte seems to have been the warehouse. In his autobiography, Sixty Years a Builder, Henry Ericsson (whose work includes the Pittsfield Building, the Chicago Motor Club, the Continental Bank, the Harvester Building and many others and who once served as Chicago's building commissioner) referred to Eckstorm

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as the "ablest warehouse architect in the city."<sup>28</sup> Of the fifteen buildings in Chicago's Loop and near north designed by Eckstorm, mentioned in Frank Randall's The History of Building Construction (1949), five (Harvester, 1907; Mallers, 1910; Garland, 1915, 1925; Musical College, 1908 and the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Building, 1907) remain and Fairbanks, Morse & Co. is the only "warehouse" type building among them. All others (like his Commerce Mart warehouse, a seven-story Mill construction building at 251-315 Grand) have been destroyed. It should be noted that the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Building is erroneously attributed by Randall to Holabird and Roche.<sup>29</sup> Robert Breugmann indicated that in the comprehensive research he did on Holabird and Roche, he found no record to indicate the firm had designed the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Building. Indeed, the September 21, 1907, Economist, in its listing of building permits, clearly attributes the structure to C. A. Eckstorm.<sup>30</sup>

The building at 900 South Wabash gains significance because none of the earlier company headquarters remain, and it has far better integrity than 606 South Michigan which served as company headquarters after 1937. In 1871, the firm, then known as Fairbanks Greenleaf had offices at 137-9 State (near Madison). The building burned in the 1871 fire, but records which were locked in a safe, survived. This enabled Charles Hosmer Morse to close out the books of Fairbanks Greenleaf & Co. In 1872, the company moved to 65 West Washington where, because of a fire, it was located only a year. Between 1873 and 1907 Fairbanks, Morse & Co. had headquarters in three buildings: 1873-1887, 111-13 Lake; 1887-1895, 162 Lake; 1896-1907, Franklin and Monroe. From 1907-1937 it was at 900 South Wabash. The firm headquarters remained at 900 for thirty years, longer than at any other previous address. In 1937, the greatly expanded firm moved their headquarters to 606 South Michigan. Frank Randall refers to the building as the Fairbanks-Morse Building<sup>31</sup> but it was built as and is referred to in the tract books as the Harvester Building.<sup>32</sup> Standing 15 stories, the Harvester was also designed in 1907 by Christian Eckstorm. It is a curious co-incidence that the architect and year for 606 and for the Fairbanks, Morse & Co. building at 900 South Wabash are identical. Aside from the name reference in Randall, there is nothing remaining in the 606 building on South Michigan to associate it with Fairbanks, Morse & Co., which once had a big showroom on the first floor. Its ground floor exterior was renovated in the 1930's, and its lobby has been completely redone. The only structure that still exists, with excellent integrity, as a visible reminder of the many years Fairbanks, Morse & Co. had its headquarters in Chicago is the fine structure located at 900 South Wabash.



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- <sup>2</sup>Willard W. Cochrane. The Development of American Agriculture:A Historical Analysis. Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 1979, pp. 89-92.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.107.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.108.
- <sup>5</sup>Pioneers in Industry:The Story of Fairbanks, Morse & Co., 1838-1945. Chicago:Fairbanks, Morse & Co., 1945.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Cochrane, Ibid., p.110.
- <sup>8</sup>Wendell, Ibid.,p.158.  
It is in dispute who actually invented the internal combustion engine.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.159.
- <sup>10</sup>Name-Plate, Fairbanks, Morse & Co.. March, 1920.
- <sup>11</sup>Pioneers in Industry. Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup>The History of Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Archives, Fairbanks, Morse & Co., Beloit, Wisconsin:Unpublished.
- <sup>13</sup>"Industry Builds the City." The Book of Beloit. Privately published, 1936, p.246.
- <sup>14</sup>Bulletin 1010, Fairbanks, Morse & Co., Manufacturers, Chicago.
- <sup>15</sup>Pioneers in Industry, Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid.

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- <sup>17</sup>The Book of Beloit, Ibid., p.244.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup>Name-Plate, Fairbanks, Morse & Co., May, 1920.
- <sup>20</sup>Moody's Manual of Railroad and Corporation Securities, Vol. 2, Industrial Section and Public Utilities. New York:Moody Manual Company, 1916, p.4103.
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- <sup>22</sup>"Robert H. Morse: Employer of Diversified Operation", Business Week, May 17, 1947.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup>Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Name-Plate. June, 1921, p.6.
- <sup>25</sup>Clark J. Herringshaw, City Blue Book of American Biography. Chicago:American Publishers Association, 1913, p.248.
- <sup>26</sup>The Book of Chicagoans. Chicago:A.N. Marquis, 1911, p.493.
- <sup>27</sup>Fairbanks, Morse & Co. Name-Plate. Bulletin 3040, @1920.
- <sup>28</sup>Sixty Years a Builder:The Autobiography of Henry Ericcson. Written in collaboration with Lewis E. Myers. Chicago:A. Kroch and Son, 1942, p.281.
- <sup>29</sup>Frank Randall, History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago. Urbana:University of Illinois Press, 1949. p.228.
- <sup>30</sup>The Economist. September 21, 1907.
- <sup>31</sup>Randall, Ibid., p.230.
- <sup>32</sup>Tract Books, Recorder of Deeds, City of Chicago.

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(See Continuation Sheet p.3. Sec 9)

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See continuation sheet p.2, Section 9

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Fairbanks, Morse & Co.  
Beloit, Wisconsin  
Chicago Public Library

10. Geographical Data

Acceage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 16 448050 4635340  
Zone Easting Northing

B           
Zone Easting Northing

C         

D         

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Sub lot 1 and the north 2½' of sub lot 2 of lot 1 in Block 19 in fractional section 15 addition to Chicago in Section 15, Township 39N, Range 14 E of the 3rd principal meridian in Cook County, Illinois

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The above described city lots is the property historically associated with the building.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Benjamin, Architectural Historian

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 711 Marion Avenue telephone (312) 432-1822

city or town Highland Park, state IL zip code 60035